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The Christian News-Letter

Edited by
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DEAR MEMBER,

No event since the war began sets in a clearer light its meaning for world history, or has power to stir deeper currents of thought, than the enactment three weeks ago by the United States of the Aid-for-Democracies Bill followed by the momentous speech by President Roosevelt. He announced not only that there was no longer the slightest question or doubt about the American policy of unqualified, immediate, all-out aid for Britain, Greece and China, and that America was going to play its full part in the struggle, but also that it " must continue to play its great part in the period of world construction for the good of humanity." It means that the British Commonwealth of Nations and the great American Republic, in association with other peoples who share their tradition of liberty, are being welded into a close alliance in a struggle to decide which of two opposed conceptions of life is to govern the future history of mankind.

THE DEFENCE OF LIBERTY

When the Lease and Lend Bill became law after being " argued in every newspaper, on every wave length, and over every cracker barrel in the land," it expressed the free convictions of a free people. The remarkable unanimity among the English-speaking communities springs from the elemental certainty that the way of life with which they are in conflict is for them intolerable. The Prime Minister acknowledged at the Pilgrims luncheon to welcome the new American ambassador that " our social system has its faults " ; it is not so much a true social unity resting on freedom that we are defending as the possibility of creating such a society. But on keeping open that possibility everything depends. The absolutely vital distinction is that whatever wrongs exist in the democracies, public opinion has the freedom and the power to set them right. Freedom of speech, freedom of religion, equality before the law, are not empty words but real achievements which, if they were to disappear, it might take centuries to revive. That men's homes are secure from visits of the Gestapo, that their persons are safe from arbitrary arrest, that they live under the protection of laws which, even if they are in some respects unjust, are yet in the main impartially and incorruptibly administered, that even those of doubtful character can say, " They can't get me—it's not against the law," that men can criticise the government and organise themselves in defence of what they believe to be right, that they can freely express their thoughts and have free access to the thoughts of others—these liberties, even if as yet imperfectly achieved, are the priceless heritage which the freedom-loving nations are guarding at immeasurable cost, and for the sake of which our own nation in particular " is being tried and proved, before mankind and history, to a degree and on a scale and under conditions which have not previously been known to human experience."

THE DANGERS OF VICTORY

Yet that is but half the picture. We cannot afford to allow the traditions and institutions in which these values have found embodiment to be destroyed, since they are

the work of many generations. But the ultimate source of the values is in the minds and souls of men, and they are consequently not only exposed to assault from without but liable to be betrayed from within. If so much hangs on the issue of the war that the very thought of defeat is intolerable, we ought to tremble hardly less at the prospect of victory. The complacency about the future which prevails in many quarters should fill us with disquiet. We are not yet the thing we claim to be. For multitudes the freedom of which we speak has little meaning in experience ; it is astonishing what they are ready to endure and to dare for what is only the flicker of a hope. Recognise to the full the initiative, resource, public-spirit and good-will among our people which recent months have revealed, and the crucial question remains whether we have the faith, disinterestedness and determination to create on the basis of freedom in face of the forces of modern society the conditions of a full and worthy life for all. To take this for granted is folly, in view of the short-sighted selfishness in some quarters and of the widespread apathy and sense that the problems of modern society are too difficult for the individual to do anything about them.

If Germany is defeated, it will fall to the English-speaking nations not only to take the leading part in social and international reconstruction but to assume the main responsibility for policing the world. Are they spiritually capable of sustaining such a responsibility and resisting the temptations to which it must expose them ? If the vanity and ambition of Germany have plunged the world into misery, are we not in danger, if we are victorious, of succumbing to the deadly temptation of pride—to that subtle, largely unconscious trust in our own qualities and powers that is ruinous to the soul ? If we were more alive to the realities of life, we should fear the insidious temptations and corruption of power no less than the armed might of Germany. I could have wished that awareness of these spiritual dangers had found larger expression in the forms provided for the national day of prayer.

AIR WARFARE

I have had several letters criticising the quotation of extracts from the sermon of Pastor von Bodelschwingh in C. N-L. No. 71. I thought I might safely take for granted that readers would understand that if a hospital was hit at Bethel it could only have been by accident.

Three reasons prompted me to make the quotation. The first is that we must not shrink from the truth. Hospitals are hit in Germany ; children are killed by bombs in Germany. There is nothing gained by disguising these facts. I believe that war with all its horrors is a lesser evil than the rivetting of the Nazi tyranny on the necks of mankind. But if I believe this, I want to do it with my eyes open to what it means and not to run away from the consequences of this belief and hide my head in the sands. Only those can make a better future who are willing to get rid of all make-believe and face reality without a screen.

Secondly, one of the chief hopes to which we must cling for the future is the reality of the Church of Christ. There are Christians in Germany and we are united to them by bonds that transcend even the antagonisms of war. One function of the Christian News-Letter is to help to maintain these bonds. Whatever the causes of the war, the personal experiences through which Christians in Germany are passing are not dissimilar from our own. How they react to them is a fact of great interest quite apart from our agreement or disagreement with what they say. It is our Christian duty to try to understand.

Thirdly, it is essential for the remaking of society to keep open the springs of compassion. One of the crimes for which it is hardest to forgive the Nazis is their deliberate contempt of mercy. But that Nazi vileness cannot be overcome by weapons of war but only by receiving into our hearts a larger measure of the infinite pitifulness of Christ. Pity is universal in its scope ; it is the quality of mercy and kindness that " they wither root and stem, if an end is set to them."

But all this refers to an incident which took place months ago. As the war takes its fateful course, a change is coming over the temper of the country and there are also developments in British air policy. I imagine that those who direct the war are as much concerned as they ever were that no bomb should be diverted from a more important to a less important military target. But the range of military objectives is being enlarged. I cannot attach any other meaning to a recent speech by the Minister for Air. He read a letter from a correspondent in Germany describing the effects of our air-raids and then went on to say : " We hate the cruelty of these bombardments. We never wanted war and all its horror and destruction, but the Nazis brought it on the world. They spared no horror to Coventry or Birmingham or London, and we must be ' copy now to men of grosser blood ' and teach them how to war."

As the war takes its course the contradiction between its necessities and the Christian purpose deepens. Where feelings are deeply stirred, on the one hand, by experience of the horrors of air warfare and, on the other hand, by humanitarian sympathies, I cannot hope to write what will meet with general agreement. All that is possible is to make as honest an individual contribution as I can to clear thought and right feeling. To get the question into a right perspective two facts must be borne in mind. First, we must be on our guard, as the Bishop of Coventry reminded us in a speech a few weeks ago, against regarding as morally defensible methods of war to which we have grown accustomed and rejecting as morally indefensible those that are novel, since they arise from changed conditions of warfare. In modern war industrial centres cannot be denied to be military targets. Secondly, if our aim is to limit human suffering, and if it be granted that the British people have made up their minds not to give in and that America will continue to resist Nazi aggression even if they were to fail, then any course that postpones the defeat of Germany may result in a far greater sum of human misery than the losses incidental to the destruction of industrial sources of supply in Germany.

Does this mean that everything is permissible in war ? I do not think so. There remains a vital distinction between retaliation for retaliation's sake and military counter-action ; between measures, however distasteful, which are adopted for good military reasons and the desire to pay the German people back in their own coin. The question of military objectives must be left, it seems to me, to those who direct the war and their technical advisers ; the civilian has not the data to judge whether measures which have the appearance of harshness may not be the means of bringing the war more speedily to an end and so of averting greater sufferings. The responsibility is one which those in authority have to carry before God. What is the responsibility of all of us is that their judgment should not be overborne by a popular clamour for revenge.

What can we do ? It is in the positive sphere that the Christian counter-action to war must find its chief expression. Both in public and in private we have a Christian duty to fulfil. We have to seize every opportunity in speech and writing of holding before people's minds the ends for which the war is being waged ; in proportion as these are realised, we shall shrink from actions incompatible with them. If we sincerely intend those ends, we have to be as different from the Nazis in aim and spirit as the cruel necessities of war permit. If the rebuilding of Europe dominates our minds we shall not indulge in unnecessary and senseless destruction. There is a lot of vile stuff being written in the press which would drag us down to the Nazi level. It must be vigorously combatted by public utterance of an opposite kind. An American who recently visited us told me that what most impressed him in talking with ordinary men and women up and down the country was the absence of the spirit of revenge. This seemed to him without parallel in any previous war. Let us do everything in our power to maintain that temper to the end.

In our private lives, let us discipline our own hearts and minds. Let us not disguise from ourselves that we are involved with our enemies in a common sin for which we have daily to ask a common forgiveness. Let us pray daily that the evils we have to inflict,

as well as the evils we have to suffer, may be transmuted in us into a hatred of violence, a divine pity for the sufferings and blindness of mankind, and a steely resolve to spend our strength in achieving social and international justice. In *The New Christian Year*[1] I read a few days ago the following prayer, attributed to Sir Thomas More, which struck me as extraordinarily relevant to our present needs :

" Almighty God, have mercy on N. and N. and on all that bear me evil will, and would me harm, and their faults and mine together, by such easy, tender, merciful means as Thine infinite wisdom best can divine, vouchsafe to amend and redress, and make us saved souls in heaven together, where we may ever live and love together with thee and thy blessed saints, O glorious Trinity, for the bitter passion of our sweet Saviour Christ, amen."

CHRISTIANITY AND CRISIS

The first two issues of the new broadsheet *Christianity and Crisis*, issued by a representative and influential group of American Christians have reached this country. Dr. Reinhold Niebuhr is the chairman of the editorial board. The broadsheet is of great interest as reflecting some of the active currents of thought in American Christianity. It may be ordered through the Christian News-Letter, as explained below.

The title of the broadsheet is prompted by the conviction of those who produce and sponsor it that our civilisation is involved in a fundamental crisis. The Protestant Churches have grown up within that civilisation. The type of faith and life represented by them have been made possible by the values which it embodies and which they have helped to form. If the attempt to destroy that civilisation succeeds, the basis of Christian life and activity as we have known these in the past will have gone. The American broadsheet, like the Christian News-Letter, believes that that attempt must be resisted by force. But the fulfilment of this duty does not make the war a "holy" war, in the sense that unqualified sanctity is claimed for the cause. However just the cause, " Christians know, or ought to know, that it does not embody the final justice. They know, however certain they may be of serving God in their cause, that God is *their* judge as well as the judge of the enemy."

Yours sincerely,

J. H. Oldham

[1] A collection of extracts from Christian teachers and saints arranged for use on each day of the year. By Charles Williams. Oxford University Press. 5s.

Christianity and Crisis: fortnightly; subscription 6s. for twelve months. Agents in Great Britain: The Christian News-Letter, Arlosh Hall, Oxford, to whom orders and remittances should be sent.

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